

Political Marketing and its efficacy. Case: Political Party *United Russia*

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Abstract



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<p>Marketing is a set of activities designed to mediate and optimize any interaction that has to do with exchange. This set of practices had been adapted to satisfy political needs of Western countries nearly 75 years ago whereas Russian political marketing is at best only 28 years old. However, the practical needs and political competition had caused it to develop very rapidly. The party <i>United Russia</i> has reached supermajority a matter of several years after its creation and successfully maintains its position: its approval rating is still rising with roughly a half of Russian citizens supporting the party. Thus, there arised a research problem to identify the main features of efficient political marketing that are exemplified by <i>United Russia's</i> political activity.</p> <p>To tackle this problem we have set several objectives, namely, to describe the essence of political marketing, its effectiveness and significance; to consider marketing activities of the party <i>United Russia</i> in general and at the moment; to evaluate efficacy of political marketing of <i>United Russia</i> and to propose measures to improve it.</p> <p>The methods employed to fulfill the objectives corresponded to the nature of a research-oriented thesis, namely, a case study. We used a conceptual framework of modern political marketing discourse. A number of theoretical models developed by different scholars were used. Comparative and statistical methods were also employed. The majority of publications used were quite recent which ensures topicality of our research.</p> <p>In conclusion, we have evaluated the efficacy of specific political marketing techniques employed by <i>United Russia</i>. Several suggestions as to how its marketing activity can be improved had been identified.</p>	
Keywords: Political marketing, Russian political market, political parties, <i>United Russia</i> , Mass Media, political PR	

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Problem and Questions.....	2
1.2	Research Aims and Objectives	3
1.3	Research Approach and Methodology	4
2	Theoretical Foundation of Political Marketing	6
2.1	What is Political Marketing?	6
2.2	Mass Media as a Tool of Political Marketing	12
2.3	PR in Politics.....	17
2.4	Efficacy of Political Marketing.....	21
3	Political Marketing on the example of the party <i>United Russia</i>	24
3.1	Political Marketing in Russia	24
3.2	Overview of the Political Party <i>United Russia</i>	30
3.3	The Implementation of Political Marketing in the <i>United Russia</i>	35
3.3.1	<i>United Russia</i> as a Market-oriented Party.....	36
3.3.2	The Party's Political Advertising	37
3.3.3	Social Media Marketing of <i>United Russia</i>	39
3.3.4	<i>United Russia</i> 's Charity Work.....	40
3.3.5	Political Memorabilia and <i>United Russia</i> -themed Products	42
3.3.6	Development Prospects of the Party	43
4	Key Results and Discussion.....	44
4.1	Analysis of the Research Results.....	44
4.2	Ethical Viewpoints	44
4.3	Reliability and Validity of Research	45
4.4	Suggestions for Future Research.....	46
5	Conclusion	48
	List of References.....	51

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Public Opinion Foundation's evaluation of *United Russia's* approval rate in 2017 (POF 2017)

Figure 2. The model of political marketing as defined by Newman (Cwalina et al. 2011, 47)

Figure 3. Line chart representing campaign news sources in the US (Pew Research Center, 2012)

Figure 4. The stages of the politics / media relationship (Flew 2016)

Figure 5. Elements of successful political marketing as defined by F. S. Khatib

Figure 6. Russian federal channels air time structure (Gavalova 2017)

Figure 7. Social media as a tool of political marketing in Russia (Milosh 2016)

Figure 8. *United Russia's* logo

Figure 9. The slogans of *United Russia*

Figure 10. Russians' attitudes towards *United Russia*, % (POF 2017)

Figure 11. *United Russia's* results at The State Duma elections (Russia Votes, n.d.)

Figure 12. Russian legislative election of 2016 results (Shpilkin 2016)

Figure 13. The number of appearances of different political parties on federal mass media channels during 2016 election campaign (CPRF 2016)

Figure 14. *United Russia* campaigners in promo costumes

Figure 15. *United Russia's* Victory day gifts for the veterans (UR official site 2013)

Figure 16. Orenburg party members preparing New Year events for children, December 2016 (UR official site 2016)

Figure 17. *United Russia* political memorabilia

Figure 18. *United Russia*-themed handmade

1 Introduction

We live in an information-dense world where the power of the mind has become a major force, along with the power to manipulate it. Having conquered the world of objects humanity reaches beyond, into the realms of its own psyche. There were many factors contributing to this change, one of the most important being a major paradigm shift in market which had switched from a producer-oriented mode to a customer-oriented one. Once people learned to manufacture products effectively in large volumes they realized that manufacturing goods had sense only if there was someone willing to buy them. If the 19th century had a word, it would be "manufacturing", yet, it turned to "consumption" in the latter half of the 20th century. Politics, being one of the main things people "consume", had also been changed in a most profound way: political process today becomes more and more about playing mind games and influencing people.

Consequently, the above-mentioned factors had made politics into a very sophisticated and complicated sphere. Besides, being a highly competitive environment the world of politics is, it's quite predictable that it started to employ marketing strategies in order to gain and maintain voters' support. It goes without saying that nowadays it takes a group of trained professionals to get one's footing in the political world. Whole research teams that study voters' behavior patterns and political marketing techniques have emerged alongside with political consultancies.

Political consulting is an integral part of politics and campaigning. Seeing that political activity is now mostly about managing the information flow, the foremost purpose of political consulting is to ensure, at the very least, the politician's presence in it, and at best, to present him in the most favourable light possible. PR communicates certain political image to different segments of voters which causes them to accept or decline a political offer. The question of how to make the process more efficient is virtually the ultimate problem of political marketing.

Russian political marketing is quite young and therefore provides rich ground for conducting scientific research. The fact that Russian political marketing is less than three decades old might seem somewhat unusual for such big and powerful country from the perspective of the less experienced onlookers. However, it is only logical given Russia's communist totalitarian past. For as long as 70 years that USSR existed the political landscape was shaped according to one main principle, which was, to rephrase J. R. R. Tolkien for the sake of our argument, "One party to rule them all". The voters didn't have any choice in one-party system but to comply with the established ideology or at

least make it appear so.

With the fall of Soviet regime, the development of democratization process in Russia and introduction of multipartism there has risen a practical need to develop political marketing techniques. Unfortunately, the theoretical groundwork hadn't been laid by that time so the Russian political leaders had to borrow some of the Western political marketing practices of that time. At first, Russian political parties were weak but gradually and steadily they learned how to promote their political offering. The most prominent example of successful political marketing implementation in Russia presents the party "*United Russia*". In a matter of six years since its foundation it has reached supermajority. Therefore, it holds scientific interest for political market researchers to look into specific marketing techniques that had been employed by the party, to analyze its positioning strategy and evaluate the efficacy of the party's political marketing activity overall.

1.1 Research Problem and Questions

In the modern era, marketing is involved in all spheres of social life including politics. The parties that implement marketing techniques most efficiently are the ones who gain voters' popularity fairly quickly and manage to maintain it at a high level. We believe that the key indicator of successful political marketing implementation is a party's approval rate.

According to official statistics of Russian Public Opinion Foundation, *United Russia's* approval rate gradually increased throughout the last years. The party's approval indicators stand as follows:

September 2011 — 40.8 % (POF 2011);

June 2016 — 45.1 % (POF 2016);

November 2017 — 50 % (POF 2017).

The most recent POF statistics from November, 2017 indicates that an average approval rate of "*United Russia*" from March 5, 2017 to November 12, 2017 is 48.27 % (Figure 1). A high support rate signifies efficient marketing strategy by analyzing which we can tackle the following research problem: What factors contribute to the efficacy of political marketing?

In order to successfully address the stated problem we need to identify the main research question of this project. We formulate this question in the following way:

What are the main features of efficient political marketing that are exemplified by *United Russia's* political activity?

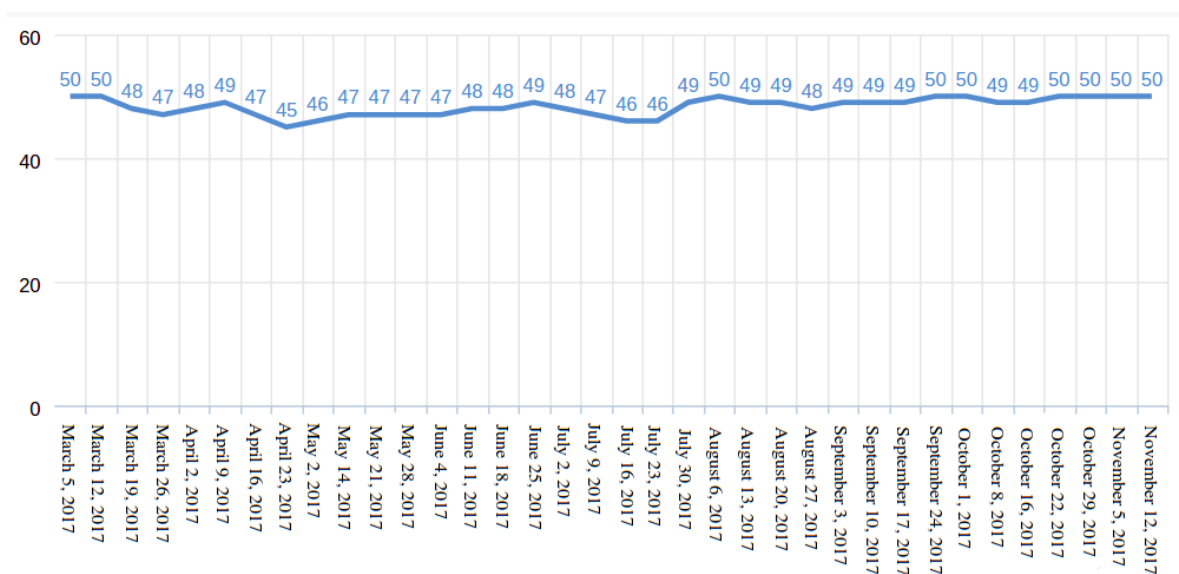


Figure 1. Public Opinion Foundation's evaluation of *United Russia's* approval rate in 2017 (POF 2017).

In addition to the main question we pose two subquestions: "What are the specific political marketing techniques that had been employed by *United Russia* and "To what extent had the implementation of these marketing techniques been efficient?" In order to answer them we'll conduct a case study focusing on *United Russia's* political marketing.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The subject of this research is political marketing. The object of the study is the political party *United Russia*. Therefore, the aim of this work is to study political marketing and its effectiveness on the example of the party *United Russia*.

We set the following three objectives of the study:

- to describe the essence of political marketing, its effectiveness and significance at the present stage;
- to consider marketing activities of the party *United Russia* in general and at the moment;
- to evaluate efficacy of political marketing of *United Russia* and to propose measures to improve it.

The first research objective deals with the necessity to understand the essence of political marketing and its significance at the present stage of political market development. Gaining insights into the nature of this phenomenon and its main aspects will provide us with theoretical framework for the further analysis of the specific case of political

marketing implementation. We'll elaborate on the role of different constituents of political marketing including the aspect of political communication and PR. The factors contributing to political marketing efficacy will be analyzed in reliance on different perspectives of the scholars.

The second objective is to overview political activity of the party *United Russia* with a view to analyze its marketing efficiency further on in the study. By collecting factual data on the party's marketing activities we'll be able to build a whole picture of *United Russia's* marketing strategy. We'll be able to identify specific political marketing tools employed by the party which will give us the answer to the first subquestion of the research. In our view, it is important to collect data on the party's activity both in the past and in present which will help us track changes in the party's political marketing and therefore help us gain insight into how *United Russia* adjusts to the demands of Russian political market.

The third objective is to examine the effectiveness of political marketing of the party *United Russia* and to make some suggestions as to how it can be improved. Fulfilling the third objective will give us an opportunity to answer the primary research question, that is, to identify the main features of efficient political marketing that are exemplified by *United Russia's* political activity, which in turn, would not only fulfill our own research goals but to contribute a wide political marketing discourse of today.

1.3 Research Approach and Methodology

As the topic of political marketing is quite new, the thesis will be exploratory in nature. Therefore, the desk research will be applied. The rationale behind the choice of this research approach is based on the following considerations. Even though our course hasn't covered this particular type of marketing we had chosen this topic due to the personal and professional interest. As our first degree is closely linked to the study of politics we assume it would provide an analytical prospective on the topic that interlinks politics and marketing. However, due to the Russians' mentality, political preferences still remain more of a personal issue for many. It is due to this feature of Russian mentality that we couldn't consider conducting any surveys openly. We believe that under such circumstances they would not provide us with a clear picture as for the citizens' interpretation of *United Russia's* political activity and its efficacy. Thus, the results of our analysis would not have been precise and unequivocal. This explains delimitation of our research.

To conduct our case study we employ a wide array of research methods ranging from description to complex analysis techniques. The theoretical foundation of the thesis

employs conceptual framework of modern political marketing discourse. A number of theoretical models were used including Lees-Marshment's typology of market orientation of political parties, Newman's political marketing model etc. When describing the party's political activity we used comparative methods to consider it within the wider context of Russian political market. Quantitative methods were also employed to assess the efficacy of *United Russia's* marketing activity and analyze how it relates to others.

The theoretical background of this thesis is constructed on a number of books, research papers, links, articles, newspapers, magazines etc., most of which had been published in the recent years. A number of Russian sources were analyzed in order to provide an inside perspective on the topic.

2 Theoretical Foundation of Political Marketing

2.1 What is Political Marketing?

In 2013 the American Marketing Association approved the following definition: "*marketing* is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". Starting off as a mechanism for distributing goods and services, marketing has grown into a scientifically organized system of different entities, research centers and markets that center around customer's needs.

The scholars have provided numerous definitions of political marketing including those given by O'Cass, Butler and Collins, Kavanagh, Savigny, Maarek, Wring, Newman, Osuagwu, Menon and others. For example, Savigny (2011) defines political marketing as the application of marketing principles and practices to the theory and practice of politics. O'Cass (2001, 137) interprets the notion of political marketing as the process of analysis, implementation, planning and election that aim at developing and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between political subjects and the voters with the view to achieve desirable political objectives. Maarek (2011) focuses on the communicational aspect defining it as a policy of political communication, a large-scale strategy that includes designing, rationalizing and conveying political communication.

One of the most common approaches to defining political marketing is by using marketing mix. In this regard, Fahed Salim Khatib defines political marketing as the political organization's use of environmental analysis and opinion research with the aim of creating and promoting a competitive offering to satisfy the electorate in exchange for its votes (2012, 4).

The term "political marketing" was coined by Kelly in 1956 to describe persuasive political practices (Wring 1997), since then the phrase has been commonly used in political discourse, especially, in the last two decades. Historically, D. Eisenhower, the 34th president of the USA, was the first to put political marketing into practice during the election campaign of 1952 (Maarek 2011, 7). In Europe political marketing was first introduced in France during presidential campaign in 1965.

Extensive research into political marketing has led to the emergence of a separate cross-disciplinary field of study that draws upon the knowledge base of several sciences, including politics, management marketing, theory of communication, sociology etc.

However, some scholars argue that as a discipline, political marketing still needs to elaborate on its basic terminology and research tools.

The concept of marketing, when applied to politics, can be viewed as the means of integration of different group and individual interests in order to achieve common good. Thus, the political market constitutes a mechanism for the cooperation of different forces which allows to fulfill common ideals and values within a given societal context via applying the mechanism of political supply and demand. When talking about politics as a market, the following elements can be singled out: exchange, liberty of contract, political competition and political power.

The nature of the exchange relationship established between a political subject and voters had been characterized by Basting (2008, 70-73). He describes the following features of this relationship:

- the operational framework has a legal foundation and is in conformity with election regulations;
- the transaction time (i.e., voting) is fixed: political demand and offer meet only once during the ballot time;
- the non-binding nature of political service: voters are not in a position to make political entities observe their promises;
- political product cannot be chosen individually, it is a decision made by the majority. Thus, there is no guarantee that a citizen will get a political product he votes for;
- it is only during electoral campaign that the provider of political services can communicate his offer and influence the consumer;
- prior to election the political offer is virtually immaterial and exists in the form of promise.

Political marketing adopted many of the techniques of commercial marketing such as market intelligence (including surveys, focus groups, polls, citizen consultations, receiving informal feedback etc.) and marketing communications (target marketing, direct mail, direct dialogue). The employment of these tools helps parties to define voters' preferences, make more informed and responsive political decisions, position themselves and shape their image accordingly.

Many analogies can be drawn between commercial and political marketing. First of all, speaking in terms of marketing, the following parallels emerge: a politician — a service provider, a voter — a customer, a set of political ideas and declared goals — a product, voting — purchasing, votes — money, political system — a marketplace, political activity — business. There are multiple intersections between business and politics: from consuming political product, to adapting managerial models to politics, to the application of commercial and corporate mindset to politics.

As Alex Marland (2003) points out, many have fallen victim to literalism when it comes to interpreting the concept. The claims about promoting politicians the same way as soap or toothpaste seem to be not only outdated and oversimplified, but somewhat comical. The selling concept may still be applied by small and underfunded campaigns, but more progressive and mature campaign teams market their candidate the way service providers do to promote their services.

To undermine the oversimplified interpretation of the concept of political marketing we have compared it to the economic market and found several critical differences. Firstly, as opposed to that of economic market, the actions of political market participants are driven by people's values, can be ideologically tinged and hold social significance. Political decisions are made with a view to increase public welfare, not to increase economical gain. Unfortunately, personal responsibility is not as much accountable for on political market as it is on economic one, this is often due to collective decision-making done by a political party as one solid entity. During electioneering, consumers of political market can only give their vote once to the candidate of their choice, whereas consumers of goods can easily buy several similar products from different sellers if they need to. When conducting politics, one is supposed to relinquish one's interests for the public weal, but in economics that is not usually the case.

Just like Marland, many political marketing scholars point to the narrowness of the research done by their peers who rely on the analogy between economic and political marketing too much. The marketing concept in politics needs to be reexamined, the researchers have to draw upon alternative marketing theories and bring their studies to multidisciplinary level (Henneberg 2007, 11).

We believe that the in-depth approach referred to by Henneberg was realized by Jennifer Lees-Marshment who developed the concept of comprehensive political marketing (2003). Some of the key principles of CPM include application of marketing to all of the activities realized by political entity, not just communication; using a whole conceptual frame of marketing and not just its separate techniques and adapting marketing theory to suit the needs of conducting political activity and analyzing it.

According to Jennifer Lees-Marshment (2001a), political entities can take different marketing stance or orientation within political "market place". According to political parties' priorities she classifies them into product-oriented (focusing on political ideas / ideological system), sales-oriented (advertising and communication techniques) and market-oriented parties (voter's demands).

The implementation of political marketing process includes the following stages:

Stage #1: the use of opinion research and environmental analysis. This stage is about evaluating political market condition and identifying market opportunities. Political marketing agents study expectation of different population groups. This in turn gives an opportunity to anticipate their reactions to certain political decisions made by political entities.

Stage #2: developing political strategy (a system of specific methods of influencing voters). The second stage involves developing specific techniques designed to exert political influence. Drawing upon the information about the voters' expectations the agents now develop a specific program elaborating on political goals and methods. They calculate probable results and allocate specific targeted groups who are most likely to support the candidate.

Stage #3: political advertising and promoting political program, candidate, blueprint for reform, etc. During this stage political marketing agents engage in all types of promoting activity that aims to raise voters' interest to the goals that were set by political entity during the previous stage.

The constitutive elements of political marketing are identified in political marketing literature in different ways. For example, Firmansah states that the process of political marketing has only two elements, namely, voters segmentation and marketing programs (Ediraras 2013, 585). The latter is about positioning a political product called 4Ps (product, promotion, price and place) and the former is done with the view to evaluate the voters' level across different categories so that "the packaging" is done according to political product categories (Ediraras 2013, 585).

Having studied the body of literature, we have determined six political marketing constituents. Although the presented model comprises of six elements, it should not be confused with Kotler & Kotler's model of candidate's marketing map which has the same number of constituents. Our model stands as follows:

1. Setting the goals of the political campaign. The goals need to specify what needs to be changed regarding the issues that the campaign addresses in a realistic manner and concrete terms.
2. Conducting environmental analysis and opinion research. Politically relevant data

obtained by this research should include information on approximate number of the party's supporters and opposers and socio-demographic characteristics of these groups, as well as some qualitative information on topical social problems, electoral preferences and the level of trust.

3. Political market segmentation, as a process of identifying groupings of voters with a view to find the right approach to the targeted groups with political message that would appeal to them the most. Some of the most important criteria for voter segmentation are demographic characteristics, employment status, income level and the time voters take to make their decision (Cwalina et al. 2011). Having identified the segments of voters, political marketing agent has to evaluate the candidate's position among different groups of electorate. It should be noted that as a political campaign progresses the groups that are targeted might change (Newman 1993).

4. Positioning, i.e., a marketing tool that revolves around main political ideas promoted by a candidate and is essential to building political strategy (Newman 1993). Positioning is carried out in several steps. The first step involves weighing the candidate's strengths and weaknesses and articulating his political vision. The next step requires conducting competition research so as to define strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's opposition. He then must target specific segments of voters he chose to direct his appeals. Positioning results in establishing political image.

5. Image-building, as a process of creating specific cognitive representation of political subject both rationally and on unconscious level. Jeziński (2004) singles out main types of political images, including expert, an ordinary man, hero, eccentric idol, father, clown, cool cat etc.

6. Managing political communication. This aspect includes choosing certain types of media (TV, radio, social media), canvassing, i.e. personal meetings with the voters on the street, advertising, creating a slogan, etc.

As we see, some of the elements of political marketing coincide with the elements of conducting political campaign, namely, the personalization of politics, the politician's image, the role of public relations and the scientificization of politics (Harris 2001).

Cwalina et al. (2011) have analyzed several approaches, theories and models that interpret the concept of political marketing, including those provided by Niffenegger (marketing mix model), Reid (marketing political product based on specificity of a multi-stage voting decision process), Kotler & Kotler (candidate's marketing map), Lees-Marshment (comprehensive political marketing), Harri (modern political marketing), etc. In our view, the most comprehensive and all-encompassing is political marketing model developed by B.I. Newman. It highlights both connection and distinction between economic

and political marketing, as well as internal and external forces influencing them. We provide the representation of Newman's model in the Figure 2.

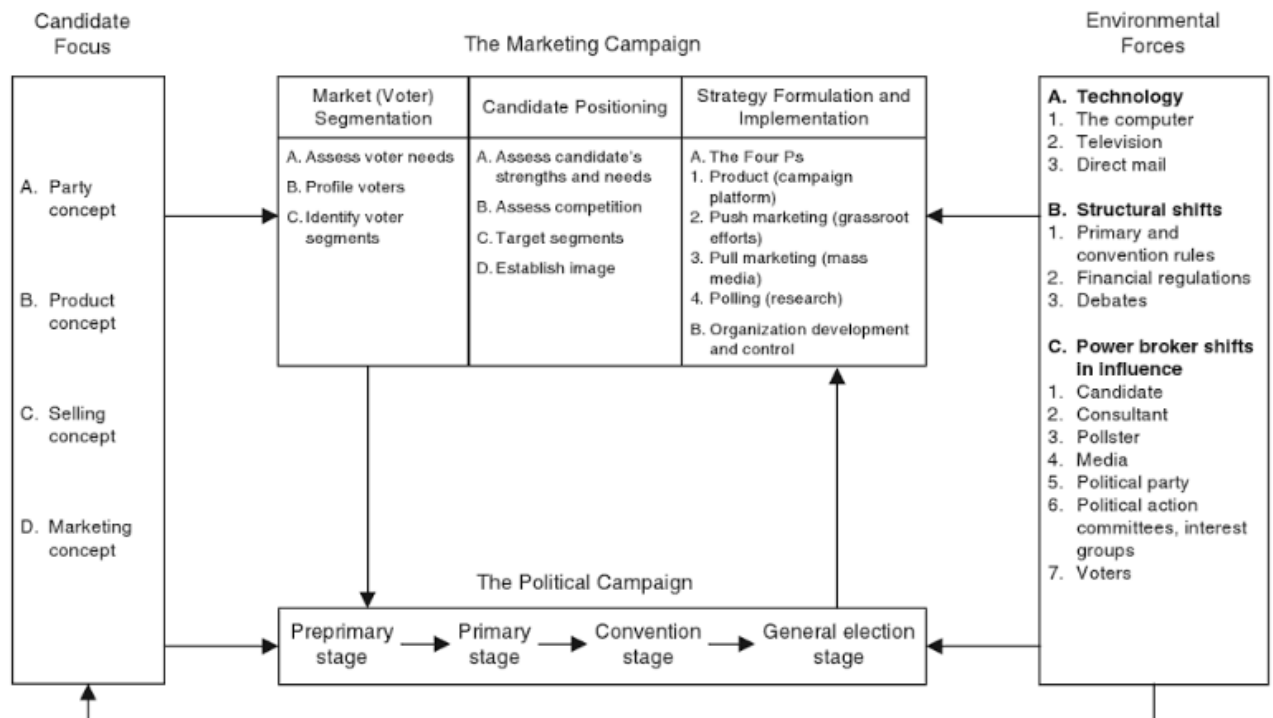


Figure 2. The model of political marketing as defined by Newman (Cwalina et al. 2011, 47)

There exist no unified classification of political marketing. Barysheva et al. (2017) present the following typology:

1. Depending on the toolset and methodology there can be conversion, stimulatory and developing political marketing;
2. Based on the nature of political impact there distinguish offensive, defensive, expectant, sustaining and opposing political marketing.

It is a common misconception that political marketing is done solely during election campaigns. Nowadays political marketing techniques are employed not only during electioneering but also well into governance. This helps to retain the electorate's loyalty and also to attract new voters. Today we can talk about the so called "permanent campaigns", a long-term process that is designed to guarantee a continued governance (Smith & Hirst 2001).

Some of the tools employed by political marketing received a fair amount of criticism. The critics claim that it puts too much emphasis on outward image and trappings rather than ideological underpinnings of party's platform. Others associate it with propaganda, persuasive and manipulative techniques, exaggeration of certain aspects and roorback.

2.2 Mass Media as a Tool of Political Marketing

Mass media is one of the most potent forces in shaping public's opinion and thus has become a powerful tool in political marketing campaigns. In some sense it became "the fourth estate" (the other three being legislative, judicial and executive powers) (Cwalina et al. 2011). Mass media has evolved from being merely a channel of communication to becoming an autonomous power center, a game-changer, a major actor in the process of campaigning (Entman 2007, 166).

The term *mass media* is defined as the main means of mass communication regarded collectively. Two main types of mass media are singled out by scholars: mainstream media and new or alternative media. Mainstream media is mass media that influences a large number of people and is reflective of prevailing currents of thought, influence, or activity. It may be contrasted with alternative media which may contain content discordant with prevailing views.

Many researchers see the link or even attribute the increase of marketing in politics to extensive media and communications strategies (Scammell 2016). Mass media space serves as a battlefield for the dominance on the political market. It is a well-known fact that a significant amount of parties' election campaign budget is spent specifically on the media coverage.

The instrumentarium of political communication means include such types of media as television, radio, newspapers, internet etc. Historically, the first type of political mass media tools were printed media such as magazines, journals, and newspapers. Politicians employed newspaper advertising techniques since the 19th century (Lees-Marshment 2001b).

The second type of media (if taken in chronological order) is broadcast media which includes radio and television. Radio has been used for the purposes of gaining voters' attention since the first half of the 20th century. The times of radio dominance are long gone now with the onset of new digital era and its technologies. However, we must give radio a credit for the continued importance in disseminating political information.

The invention of television has led to the emergence of political TV advertising. The first presidential candidate to rely primarily on TV ads was Dwight Eisenhower (Newman 2002). The dominance of the television as a mass medium has lead to a major shift in the ways the politics was conducted, especially, considering the possibility of engaging the ideologically neutral segment of potential voters in the political discourse.

Alternative media differ from established or dominant types of media in terms of their content and the way they are produced and distributed. They include weblogs and social media. Internet technologies and social media provide politicians with plethora of digital tools enabling the public to engage in political life. Social media is exceptionally potent political communication tool in terms of getting instant feedback from the voters which allows politicians to evaluate the effectiveness and to fine-tune their political marketing.

However, there is also a downside to going digital for politicians. Even a tiniest mistake of politician, a funny slip of the tongue, can be instantly recorded and downloaded to Youtube, then replicated and shared on social media and ultimately, growing viral. For example, a minor loss of memory by Rick Perry in 2012 which had been taped and posted on Youtube has lead to his withdrawal of candidacy (Maarek 2014).

In the Figure 3 we present the findings of Tom Rosenstiel and Amy Mitchell who conducted a study designed to estimate the popularity of different types of media among the US voters and its dynamics over a 12-year period.

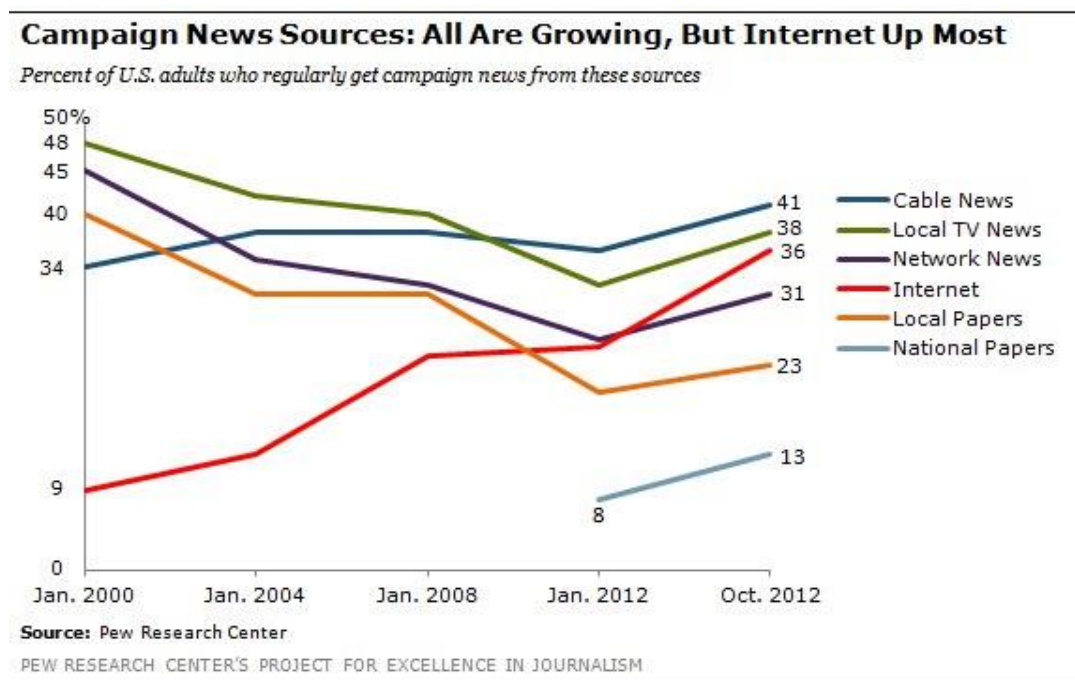


Figure 3. Line chart representing campaign news sources in the US (Pew Research Center, 2012)

Interestingly, the voters perceive non-paid media, such as television and newspapers, to be more valuable as sources of information than political advertising and the internet sources (O'Cass 2002). Contrary to this are the findings of Kim & Johnson (2009) who

studied credibility of different sources of political information in South Korea. They found that independent online newspapers turned out to be more credible than either traditional media or other internet sources.

Terry Flew singles out three main stages of the development of politics / media relationship (2016), they are as follows (Figure 4):

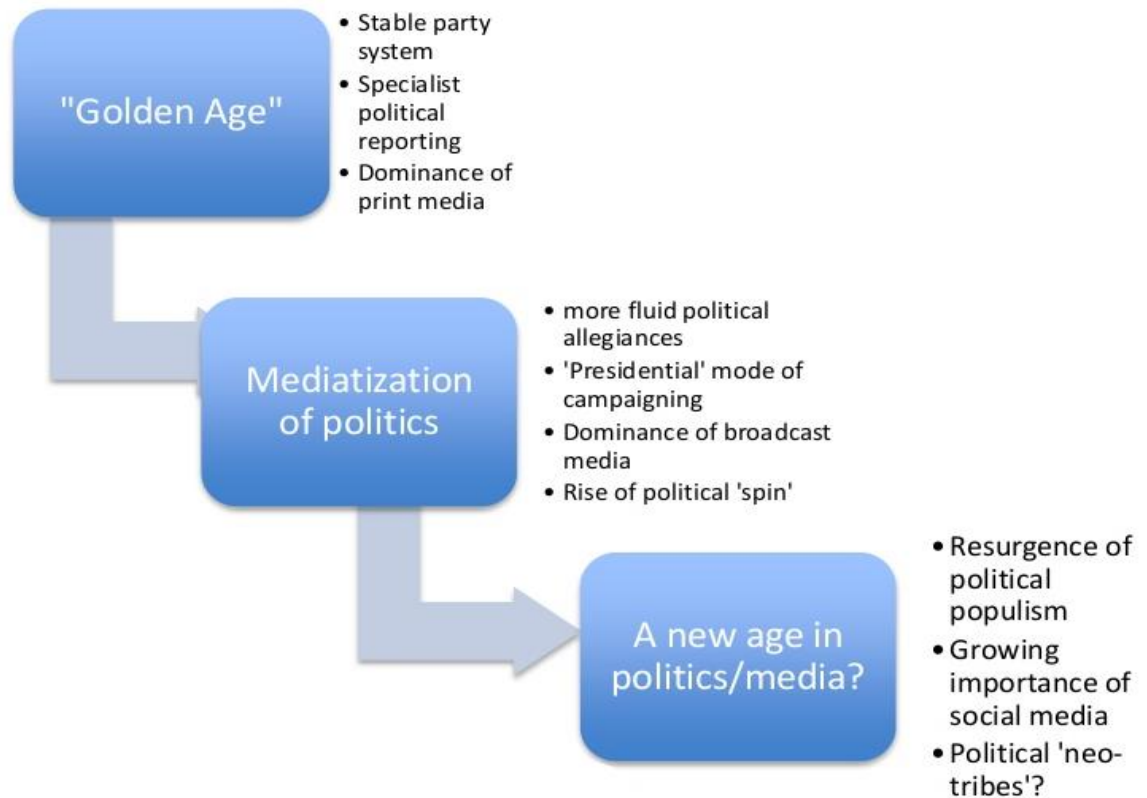


Figure 4. The stages of the politics / media relationship (Flew 2016)

For the most part, the Flew's model corresponds to the three stages of the development of political communication described by Blumer and Kavanagh (1999, 215) which include the "golden age", the television age and the third age of political communication. The "golden age" stage had lasted for two decades after World War II. The key aspect of this first stage was about permanent identification of political subjects. The issues concerning the party's strengths and weaknesses along with how they compare to those of other parties were discussed at length. Political discourse was centered around ideological foundations and claims.

The television era began at around 1960s when the political parties had lost control over the information received by the voters. Viewers gained access to a highly detailed

information on different political parties which has led to the growing of ideologically neutral segment of voters. The onset of television era had allowed for parties to reach the groups of citizens that were previously not engaged in political life whatsoever and had made their votes desirable for those competing for power.

Finally, the third age of political communication is characterized by multiplicity of the media channels. The authors provide us with a peculiar metaphor: a media system is a hydra with multiple heads always hungry for food (ibid.). The third era is about extensive spread of information via as many channels as possible. This led to the rise of such phenomenon as a hypermedia campaign which Howard (2006) defines as a political organization that adopts digital technologies in an innovative way and changes its structure in accordance with the new communication practices. One of the main responsibilities of a party leader in this context becomes coordinating political communication. At the same time, in order to increase a party's popularity politicians rely more and more on populism, that is, simplistic political discourse and assertive policy designed to maximize the voters' support.

Maarek (2014) also studied the ways in which media involvement in political communication have changed over the years. He claims that their interaction had gone in the steps of commercial marketing: from mass marketing relying mostly on TV and press, to "direct marketing" done with the help of mailing, phoning and surveys, to marketing one-on-one with the rise of Internet and blogging.

Today's audience exerts more power over media content than in the past. This is due to more participatory nature of the overall communications landscape propelled by networking, wide spread of social media and ample opportunities to engage in public speech. Moreover, the public can easily withdraw any unpopular political decision made by some party or the government by using digital media and online petition websites (Maarek 2014).

We believe freedom of the media to be an integral part of proper functioning of democracy. However, in actuality, mass media are often related to some kind of centralized organization. Broadcasting of radio and TV programs as well as issuing newspapers inarguably depends on some capital and might be influenced by the source of this funding (Schudson 2002).

The patterns of framing mediated communication intended at persuading the audience to support this or that seeker of political power became known as a media bias (Entman

2007). Three main types of media biases are distinguished, namely, gatekeeping bias, statement bias and coverage bias (D'Alessio & Allen 2000, 135).

Gatekeeping bias is realized with the help of editors or formally organized groups who select and reorganize political information to be presented to the public, or sometimes limit it. Some of the modern forms of gatekeeping include moderating blogs and chats on the Internet and using search engines as gatekeepers of public communication. The consequence of gatekeeping is presenting the pieces of information and editing it in such a way that would most likely to appeal to the voters.

As D'Alessio and Allen (2000, 141) point out, coverage bias refers to quantitative features of coverage and can be measured in the inches of newspaper and magazine columns or number of appearances on television and on other media. It is the most easily assessable bias. The statement bias can be observed when journalists or other media agents express their own attitude towards this or that political fact. This bias can take many forms, yet, it all boils down to presenting politicians or parties in favourable or unfavourable light.

Cwalina et al. (2011) distinguish three main media effects, i.e., the ways in which media can influence voters: agenda-setting, framing and priming. Agenda-setting factor reflects the relationship between the topics highlighted in the media sources and their salience in the minds of the voters. The issues that get the most coverage are typically regarded by citizens as being more important. However, simply getting media coverage does not guarantee the success of promulgating certain issues. It depends on overall political context and public concern, as well as the party's ability to adopt media agenda to its priorities.

Priming refers to altering standards by which people make political judgments (ibid.). This media effect actually has a neurobiological explanation: when taking decision people commonly apply the information that is most accessible in their memory and tend to discard other aspects that they don't find topical. Thus, by calling voters' attention to some political issues while ignoring the others it is possible to plant certain memory that would be most easily reachable in the moment of making political decision or voting.

Finally, media framing can be defined as the process of selecting and assembling pieces of information in a certain way so as to promote their specific interpretation (Entman 2007). In practice, framing is done with a help of small alterations to presenting the information, for example, by different word choice. Semenko and Valkenburg (2000, 98) single out the following types of media framing: conflict frame, morality frame, human

interest frame, responsibility frame, economic consequences frame.

One of the most prominent media industry trends nowadays is a shift towards making news and current affairs programs more entertaining. Today's media environment is full with entertainment content which also influences campaign messaging strategies. Jacques Gerstle (2002) points out that more and more entertaining and cultural content is used to express political purposes. On one hand we believe that this trend may lead to trivializing of the ways of presenting political information, but on the other hand it helps to bring in more viewers and attract a non-political part of the audience.

Particular attention should be given to the phenomenon of political parallelism which reflects the links between media organizations and political tendencies (Hallin & Mancini 2004). It's important to know that more often than not there exist some organizational connections between media and political parties. Journalists and other media personnel might be involved with political parties in several ways, such as being former or current political actors, having political affiliations as a way of career advancement, journalists' distinct political orientations and allegiances being reflected in media.

2.3 PR in Politics

According to PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) definition, public relations is a strategic process of communication that facilitates building mutually beneficial relations between different organizations and their publics.

Despite a crucial role public relations play in political management and communication there aren't so many definitions of political PR in academic literature. Among the few, three definitions have claimed our attention, namely, the ones given by Astrid Zipfel, Brian McNair and Strömbäck & Kioussis.

Zipfel (2008) defines political PR as a number of strategic communication activities carried out by political process participants in order to fulfill informative and persuasive goals to suit one's political interests. However, this definition views political PR as one-way communication process and doesn't account for many other factors influencing political communication (Schweickart & Neil 2016). We believe that political PR is a two-way process that includes informing public as to what's happening on political arena as well as giving politicians an insight into public opinion. Thus, PR in politics is not unidirectional but rather bidirectional.

McNair (2003) points out that PR in politics is a term that refers to information management and media tactics aimed at generating positive publicity and eliminating negative one. It worth noting that McNair's definition doesn't fully present more broad modern understanding of political PR which integrates the views of other research areas (Tomić & Grbavac 2016).

According to Strömbäck & Kiousis (2011), political PR is a managing process in which political entities build good reputation and maintain efficient relations with the target public by employing certain communication techniques in order to achieve political goals. We believe that this last interpretation is the most comprehensive one and reflects the concept of political PR in all its complexity.

The ultimate goal of political PR is to establish efficient and functional relations between political entities on one side, and the general public on the other. The tasks of political PR correspond with that of any PR-campaign and include: 1) establishing relations with the target public in order to change its voting behavior; 2) creating, managing and sustaining a political image that promotes trust and matches public interest; 3) ensuring the party's leading position among its rivals; 4) spreading the political influence by bringing in some of the most famous and successful people; 5) maintaining a certain microclimate within an organization.

Historically, political PR emerged from the corporate PR which first developed in the US at the beginning of the 20th century. Corporate PR was first applied to politics in 1917 when US President Wilson established a Public Information Committee to direct public opinion about World War I. The Democratic Party formed a PR office in 1928 and the Republicans did so in 1932. The first political PR consultancy was found in 1933 in Los Angeles by Leone Baxter and Clem Whittaker. By the 1970s the numbers of such consultancies have reached hundreds in the US, the UK and other democratic countries and continue to be on the rise (McNair 2017).

Modern political PR activities rely on the knowledge base of other fields such as communication theory, media theory, social and political sciences, journalism practice, etc. Bruce I. Newman (1999) points out that the most pivotal part of political PR is the process of creating political image which has become extremely important in modern democracies. The techniques employed in promotional campaigns are designed specifically to build a certain image in the voters' mind by evoking emotional and cognitive response. In order to gain electoral advantage the parties draw the image on the most favorable sides of their policies and politicians. Besides image-building, they also employ other PR techniques

such as media relations, photo opportunities, sloganizing, event management, etc.

According to McNair (2003), there are four types of activities in political PR:

- media management;
- image management;
- information management;
- internal communications of the political organization.

Let us focus on each type of political PR activity. Media management is a spectrum of practices designed to influence and manipulate media organizations employed by political actors in their pursuit of certain political goals. Media management is done by so called spin doctors who maximize positive press coverage and minimize a negative one. According to Tomić & Grbavac, the most common techniques of media management are soundbite, pseudo-events and spin (2016). We discuss the issue of media management more extensively in the subchapter dedicated to media and politics.

Image management is an integral part of political PR. It relates to creating a suitable for political purposes personal image of a politician or a corporate image of some organization (Tomić & Grbavac 2016). Even the tiniest details are relevant when it comes to image management. McNair (2003) states that nowadays political image is shaped not only by what the political figure or entity says and does but also by how it does it. For example, the style of political speech delivery affects public opinion just as much as the contents of speech.

The importance of political image has become especially crucial after the World War II which is associated with the popularity of TV. According to Michael Cockerell, Harold Macmillan was the first British prime-minister to successfully create a positive political image on television as he was the first to use tele-prompter which made his speech sound more natural compared to Winston Churchill (Cockerell 1989). When talking about more modern examples of positive political image-building, Margaret Thatcher comes to mind. She took lessons to improve pronunciation and chose her suits with great consideration.

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the peculiarities of voters' perception of the nonverbal image of candidates. Mattes et al. (2010, 41) have presented test subjects with pictures of politicians and asked them to evaluate their competence, deceitfulness, threat and attractiveness based solely on the picture. Then researchers compared these results to actual election outcomes. Quite predictably, they found positive correlation between perceived level of competence and high number of votes, as well as a

link between election failure and giving physical impression of threat. Surprisingly, the study suggests that attractiveness is associated with being incompetent and can bring a politician's rating down.

Information management is a set of activities that aim to control the information flow from the political entities to the public. In democratic societies political information is freely given to the public whereas in totalitarian systems it tends to be suppressed, censored and manufactured. Some of the most common information management activities include: selective release of information, release of false information, advance leaks of information, embargoes, information overload, photo opportunities, news blackouts and censorship (McNamara 2005).

Finally, internal communications management refers to the information flow within a political organization (Tomić & Grbavac 2016). It's crucial for the party to keep its members in the loop as for the current issues, to promote cooperative decision making and to coordinate political actions.

Lilleker and Jackson (2010) argue that political PR orientates not only to voters but also to stakeholders, other political entities and sources of civic and economic power. Party's media coverage also depends on some larger forces than the work of the party's PR unit such as journalists' agenda and the attitudes and political orientation adopted by the media owners.

Political PR is realized through the following stages:

1. Initial stage of information flow formation;
2. Information flow segmentation and manipulation;
3. Establishing informational partnership, providing preferred media channels with information.

Political PR techniques implementation has a number of positive effects on political life. First of all, political PR reflects democratic values of the society as each voter has a well-informed choice. Secondly, PR techniques facilitate politicians' understanding of voters' requirements and help them build and popularize their image not by means of totalitarian coercion but on the basis of fair competition. And thirdly, PR methods make political race during election campaign more transparent and visible to public.

Overall, the body of political PR research is quite extensive and includes research into agenda-building process and all the parts of political communication process.

2.4 Efficacy of Political Marketing

In the Encyclopedia of Political Communication by Kaid & Holz-Bacha (2008) political efficacy is defined a sense that one's actions can impact the political process. The efficacy of political marketing then refers to such employment of environmental analysis, voters segmentation, positioning, image-building and political communication techniques that ensure fulfilling the objectives of political entity.

Marland et al. (2011) point out that overall success of the party depends on it being successful in all aspects of campaigning, which includes:

- the earned media campaign (coverage in the news);
- the paid media campaign (political advertising);
- the local campaign which targets the activity of electoral districts;
- the direct voter campaign (contacting voters via e-mail or other media);
- the social media campaign (politician's activity on facebook, twitter, etc.).

Khatib (2012) states that the efficacy of political marketing is determined by the success of the following campaign strategies: market orientation, conducting marketing research, market segmentation and targeting, image-building and candidate positioning (Figure 5). The results of Khatib's findings suggest that the main factor that determines efficacy of political marketing is successful image-building (ibid.). This statement had been also supported by a study into effectiveness of political marketing done by Farkade (2014).

Khatib (2012) had also drawn some other conclusions concerning political marketing efficacy. Interestingly, some of his findings contradict with the results of the studies conducted by Lees-Marshment, Newman, and Ormrod. For example, he claims that, statistically, adopting a market-oriented strategy is of no significant relevance in regard to the efficacy of political marketing. However, we agree with the above-mentioned scholars who claim its significance. But being market-oriented should not be confused with marketing-orientedness. The latter is about superficial focus on changing advertising and message design while the former orientation focuses on making real changes in the political product offering (Marland et al. 2011).

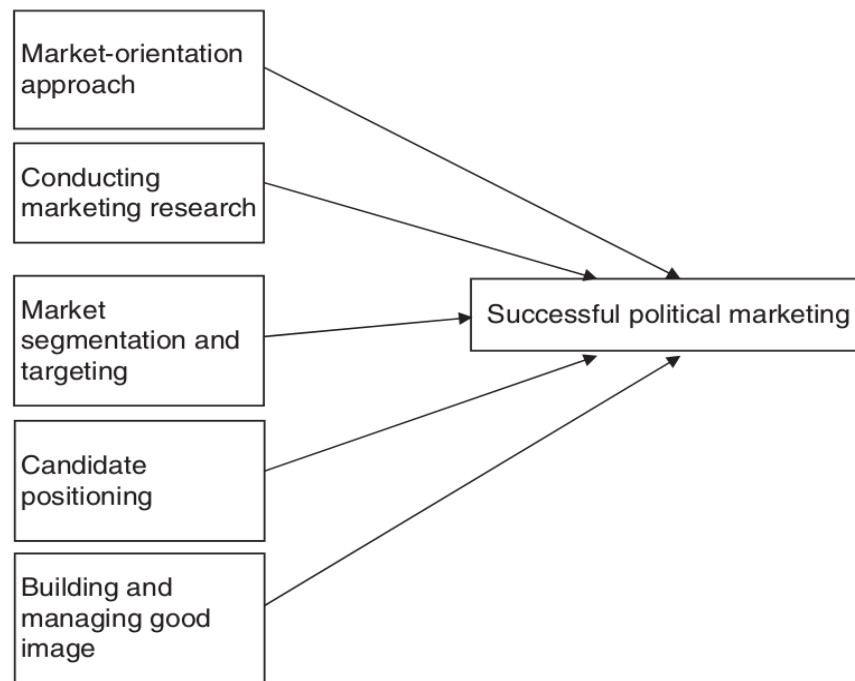


Figure 5. Elements of successful political marketing as defined by F. S. Khatib

Furthermore, Khatib argues that conducting efficient marketing research does not positively correspond to achieving political marketing success. We find Khatib's conclusions to be rather ambiguous, counterintuitive and, to some extent, not sufficiently substantiated. However, we support his claims as for importance of positioning, image-building, market segmentation and targeting.

Farkade (2014) conducted a study into the factors that affect political marketing efficacy. His case study includes the answers of 500 respondents from Indian state of Maharashtra as for the factors that influence their political party preferences. Having compiled statistical data, he presented a list of these factors that stands as follows (from the most important to the least): 1) party's ideology; 2) the presence of the party at a state level; 3) party's past performance; 4) honesty; 5) parliamentary candidates of a party; 6) party's image; 7) general activities of the party; 8) party's economical condition; 9) ways of understanding topical problems.

Farkade (ibid.) also examined the efficacy of using different media channels and promotional tools. He came up with the following listing (starting from the most effective): 1) television; 2) newspapers / magazines; 3) radio; 4) Internet sources; 5) posters / hand bills; 6) booklets. However, we think that in many European countries the results would be somewhat different as to the position of the radio on the list, for clearly Internet resources would have surpassed radio in popularity.

The success of political marketing of a political subject relies heavily upon the credibility. Lees-Marshment (2011b) points out that the more credible the source seems to the people the more votes a candidate will likely receive. However, the factors causing one to perceive a political message as credible seem to depend on particular word choice and specific word cues which demands further psychological studies.

Another important factor is to make politicians' programs understandable by voters, that is, to make its presentation "voter-friendly". Politicians shouldn't use too complicated political terminology that would seem vague for most voters, nor should they slip into blatant populism, instead, a middle ground should be found in this respect.

In our opinion, the efficacy of political marketing lies first and foremost in the ability of the party to address specific needs of each of the voters segments. Different age groups should be targeted accordingly. For example, the older generation would be attracted to a valid and substantiated ideology of the party presented on TV or in press, while younger people might turn their attention to some elements of advertising like political party slogans and symbols and will be more likely to spend their time on social networks to get some political information. When targeting specific groups of voters political marketing agents should take into account such characteristics as age group, education, employment status, involvement in political life, "fixedness" of political judgments, decision making time, etc. so as to successfully address the expectations of each group.

Regardless of which elements of political marketing are interpreted as most important, it's only logical that the successful implementation of each of the political marketing constituents, including goal-setting, environmental analysis, market segmentation and targeting, positioning, image-building and managing political communication, will lead to its overall efficacy. Our analysis of the effectiveness of *United Russia's* political marketing will therefore focus on each of these aspects. The most prominent features of the party's marketing activities will be discussed in the next chapter with the emphasis on *United Russia's* advertising and political communication management techniques. Conclusion as for the efficacy of the party's political marketing in general will be structured in relation to the aforementioned constituents.

3 Political Marketing on the example of the party *United Russia*

3.1 Political Marketing in Russia

Political culture of Russia is inextricably linked with the institutional background, Soviet political heritage, the state of the media and public discourse and vision of the future of Russian society.(Samoilenko & Erzikova 2017, 268). To truly understand political marketing in Russia one also has to understand the peculiarities of political system development in its historical aspect, that is, departification which followed Soviet Union's demise, the rise of weak parties during Yeltsin era and the transformation occurring between it and post-Yeltsin period (Roberts 2012a, 8).

The emergence of political marketing in Russia at the end of 1980s is associated with the start of market-oriented reforms, political transformations and establishing democratic elections. Russian intensive political market formation process was marked by the rise of many political subjects, social and political movements, electoral associations and their leaders, along with independent candidates who engaged in avid political competition as the elections were held almost every year. The third wave of democratization had also changed Russian political landscape as it brought spirit of competitiveness and pluralism into social, economic and political space.

However, Russian electoral marketing wasn't fully fledged till 1993, the year State Duma elections were held. Prior to that time electoral campaign techniques were not actually popular on Russian political market. The term "political advertising" was absent in Russia's law till as late as 1999 (Saitova 2013, 266). However, as Russia's political marketization progressed, political advertising techniques became the main means of influencing the voters' behavior. Specificity of Russian political advertising had been studied by Saitova (2013) in her case study of presidential election campaign of 2012. She analyzed advertising techniques employed by each presidential candidate.

V. Putin's advertising aimed at creating a strong image that represented stability, pragmatism, order and accountability. The positive attitude towards this image was reinforced by Russian most prominent opinion leaders and celebrities such as I. Akinfeev, T. Navka, E. Vaenga, Y. Bashmet, M. Galustyan, A. Dzhigarkhanyan and others. Putin's political clips appealed to clearly stated target groups (students, pensioners, state employees, the military etc.) (Saitova 2013, 268).

G. Zyuganov's advertising appealed and mythologized old communist symbols of power, yet, it had given them a new spin. One of the clips had mimicked Hollywood film trailer

where Zyuganov himself was portrayed as a blockbuster character. This was a perfect way to attract younger voters. To maintain the trust of pro-communist older generation of voters Zyuganov guaranteed industrial development and maintaining Soviet ideological heritage. For this voter segment he used some hardcore communist slogans such as "Power to people". Finally, to attract more neutral voters he tapped into an idea of building a strong community (Saitova 2013, 269).

M. Prokhorov's political Youtube ads created a fresh and bright image of a strong and ambitious person. The ads depicted life stories that took place either at school or at wedding and were presented with a touch of humour. Sadly, for all the creativity that was poured into this advertising, it failed to reflect any of the candidate's political ideas (ibid.).

Surprisingly, V. Zhirinovsky's image presented in 2012 ads had quite mitigated temper compared to his usual political self. Zhirinovsky was also trying to appeal to the majority of voters by creating an image many people could identify themselves with. For example, in several political clips he was cooking, fishing, playing chess or sitting in front of the fireplace with a dog. Every Zhirinovsky's slogan at that campaign was ideologically balanced with diplomatic precision so as to avoid any extreme claims that could drive a wedge (Saitova 2013, 270).

Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that Russian political advertising develops very rapidly and has several differently directed trends, the common feature being the emphasized role of image-building. Some of its most common trends are: appealing to people's values, creating either well-recognized and familiar image or a rather exotic one, celebrity advertising, employing creativity and humour etc.

The most notable feature of Russian electoral marketing is its high level of absenteeism which reached an all-time high on Parliamentary elections of 2003. Altuhova (2006) explains Russian absenteeism not by aversion to politics per se, but rather by non-tolerance to the ways it has been conducted.

Secondly, Russian electoral marketing is characterized by the significance of lobbying power in achieving electoral success. Advantages of administrative offices became the main factor influencing the outcome of 2003-2004 elections. Administrative resources came to be even more important than financial. Altuhova (ibid.) provides the following listing of the factors influencing electoral success in Russia (in descending order of priority): administrative, financial, media and politico-technological factors.

In a climate of growing democratization in Russia political PR and image-building became other prominent aspects of political marketing. Emergence of PR as a type of professional occupation and applied science in Russia was driven by the development of social relations, civil society institutes and socio-economic framework. However, theoretical foundations of PR in Russia are underdeveloped and cannot meet the practical needs in full. Due to the late onset of democracy compared to the Western countries Russia was not able to establish its own distinct "brand" of PR and image-building.

A critical shift has been observed in Russian political PR and image-building: now they tend to be more image-centered rather than program-centered. As opposed to earlier times when Russian politicians were relying heavily on ideology to win the voter's support, they are now trying to capture their attention by creating powerful political image. To achieve this, they seek professional consultancy services. Russian political image-making market is dominated by such companies as *The Centre of Applied Political Research*, *Niccolo M*, *Aurora*, *Indem*, *Videointernational*, etc.

One of the most important political marketing tools in Russia is TV advertising. Shortly before Russian Election Day, 2017 Gavalova (2017) conducted a study that focused on how much coverage TV channels allocated to each political party. Overall, in August 2017, more than 10 broadcasting hours were contributed to political programs on Channel One Russia, Russia-1, REN TV, NTV and TV Tsentr. The percentage of air time contributed to each party stands as follows:

- United Russia — 47 %;
- LDPR — 19 %;
- Just Russia — 18 %;
- CPRF — 16 %.

This figures differ from channel to channel. Interestingly, even though according to the law, state-run Russia-1 and Russia-24 (FSUE "VGTRK") have to divide their air time equally for each party, Russia-1 seemingly favoured *United Russia* (33 % of air time) and significantly cut CPRF's time (17 %). In the Figure 6 we represent how Russian channels divide their air time between political parties as assessed by Gavalova (2017).

Parties	Channel 1 Russia	REN TV	TV Tsentr	Russia-1	NTV (Russia)
United Russia	85 %	54 %	51 %	33 %	24 %
LDPR	6 %	46 %	25 %	17 %	67 %
A Just Russia	4 %	—	4 %	25 %	4 %
CPRF	4 %	—	20 %	25 %	6 %

Figure 6. Russian federal channels air time structure (Gavalova 2017)

Apart from TV advertising, Internet technologies have become increasingly important as political marketing tools in Russia. Internet sources have evolved from being merely an entertainment space into a powerful tool capable of changing political landscape. During 2008-12 Medvedev's presidency, the number of active bloggers and social media users had significantly increased which facilitated user-generated content production (Samoilenko & Erzikova 2017, 269). This especially holds true for social media.

In 2016 Russian Civil Society Foundation has compiled a report on social media political marketing in Russia. According to their findings, a number of political parties have adopted traditional SMM strategy, i.e., parties present identical content on different social media. The list of parties according to their popularity on social media stands as follows: United Russia, LDPR, CPRF, "Civic Platform", "Right Cause", "Yabloko", "A Just Russia", "Patriots of Russia" (Figure 7). The Foundation views VKontakte as a social media that provides most tools for engaging voters.

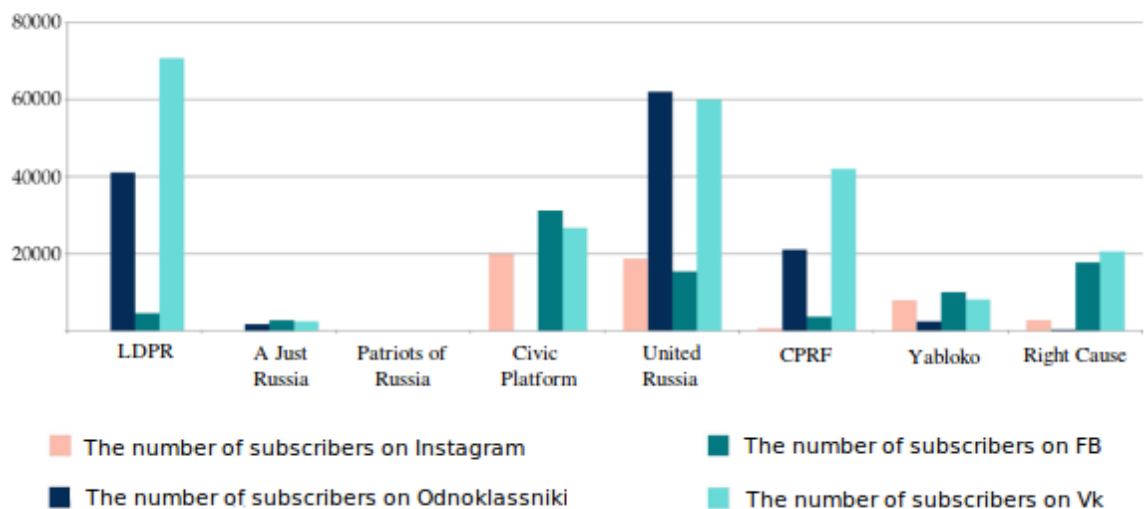


Figure 7. Social media as a tool of political marketing in Russia (Milosh 2016)

We'll elaborate on the peculiarities of social media activity of the political party *United Russia* in the subchapter devoted solely to this party's political marketing. Many of its competitors are heavily relying on social media tools as well. For example, LDPR surpassed *United Russia* in the number of subscribers on VKontakte and the level of their engagement (Milosh 2016). Most of the materials presented are Zhirinovskiy's political speeches, however, the information of the party's activity and inner politics is underrepresented.

When taking into account the number of posts, CPRF is the most active party (an average of 12 posts per day). To engage a younger generation of voters the party recently has created an account on Instagram. Among the weak spots of the party's social media activity we should note insufficient amount of information on the party's program, political activity and achievements and decrease in the level of Facebook users engagement (ibid).

Civic Platform has a firm grasp of three main social media, namely, Facebook, V Kontakte and Instagram. Presented materials include the interviews with the party's leaders, conferences and accounts of social events as well as some not heavily loaded with politics polls and humour. It should be noted that the content is highly original. The number of subscribers is rises steadily across all of the party's social media pages even though the number of posts per day has decreased lately.

There should be noted some downsides of using internet for political purposes in Russia, at least from the government's point of view. Berezovskaia (2015) points out that regardless of democratization process, power centres are reluctant to engage into actual dialogue and can easily block any provocative anti-government comments. Secondly, internet can be used as a tool of mass manipulation to radicalize the voters. Black PR agents can disseminate false information to undermine trust towards a legitimate leader.

When comparing the efficacy Russian cyberpolitics to that of Western European countries there can be found some space for improvement. European marketing companies are active networkers, they combine the efforts of many groups who are willing to help promote a political cause by using crowdsourcing techniques. They reach voters not only during election campaigns but establish a long-term communication with citizens. Although Russian politicians are equipped with the same internet technology and tools their networking techniques are underdeveloped. Citizens' communication with power structures is limited and may be even seized after elections (ibid.).

Russia's reluctance to employ internet tools on a broader scale is driven by several factors (ibid.). First of all, the information flow on the internet is relatively unrestricted as opposed to the channels controlled by the government. Therefore, multiplicity of views is bound to take place, including the views which contradict the government policy. Secondly, despite the proclaimed accessibility of information bureaucracy tends to partially withhold it which virtually violates citizens' rights. Thirdly, some of the latest election campaigns have proven that even candidates with very limited administrative and financial resources can gain extensive electorate support by targeting primarily internet audience (especially,

taking into account Moscow mayoral election of 2013).

In 2014 a new modification on the Federal Law on Information, Information Technologies and on Protection of Information came into affect (Federal Law No. 149-FZ). Article 15 of this law states that in case of detecting the information containing appeals to extremist activities, riots or any other mass actions breaching established order the government agencies will restrict access to such information. However, besides taking down some extremist sites a significant number of independent and opposition sites had been also blocked.

Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that Russian politicians still approach internet tools with caution as they consider internet environment "the dark playground" capable of destabilizing political situation. This may only mean that today's Russian political market is far from free competition model and is drawn towards command and control regulation of political resources.

3.2 Overview of the Political Party *United Russia*

*Whatever organization we create,
it always turns out to be CPSU.*
Viktor Chernomyrdin

The party was formed on December the 1st of 2001 as a result of a merger of a party *Unity* and a political bloc *Fatherland — All Russia*. Its original name was All-Russian Party of Unity and Fatherland — *United Russia*, however, it changed to All-Russian political party *United Russia* in 2003 (Roberts 2012a, 9). The party's ideology is social centralism and traditionalist conservatism, it has right-wing position. *United Russia* logo depicts a bear which is a widespread symbol of Russia and also the country's flag (see the Figure 8).

According to its charter (2016), the main goals *United Russia* pursues are the following:

- to ensure that government policy and the decisions made by Russian Federation state bodies meet the interests of Russian citizens;
- to form public opinion that correlates with main provisions of the Party's charter, to provide political education for citizens, to promote free communication of citizens' ideas to the State and political entities with the view to influence their political will;
- nomination of candidates for elections of the president of the Russian Federation, State Duma deputy elections and pursuing other high official posts.



Figure 8. *United Russia's* logo (UR official site 2017a)

In the first three years of political activity the party claimed its main objectives to be restoring Russia's unity and solidifying its territorial integrity, forming common legal framework as well as ensuring political and economic stability. At the party's VI Congress held in 2006 the members decided to launch a number of party projects. There have been adopted a number of infrastructure projects such as "Urban areas", "Local community centre", "Small towns' parks", "Russian libraries", "Children's sport", "Pure water", "Russian forest" and social development projects, including "Education modernization", "Healthy future", "Health to children", "Kindergartens to children", "Close-knit family", "Every child is important to Russia", "An older generation", "On-site clinic", etc.

Over the years *United Russia* has changed several slogans (Figure 9):

Year	Slogans
2003	We believe in Russia! We believe in ourselves!
2009	Come on, Russia!; Save and grow!
2010	Unity, spirituality, patriotism!
2011	The future lies with us!; We'll win together!
2016	Our task is to act on people's interests!; Our duty is to hear everyone!; Our goal is to devise and protect Russia's future!; Having made Russia whole, we'll make it strong!

Figure 9. The slogans of *United Russia*

The highest elective position of *United Russia* is the Party Chairman who is elected every 5 years. As of 2017, this post is held by a Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev. The highest institution of the party, The Supreme Council, devises the party's development

strategy and is headed by the Supreme Council chairman. Supreme Council Bureau is a subsidiary body that contributes suggestions as for convocation of a Congress and candidates for the main posts. The party's executive body consists of Party Congress and the General Council. Central board of a party encompasses Party Congress, the Supreme Council, the General Council, the Presidium of the General Council, General Executive Committee and Central Supervisory Commission. Central board organizes the party's discussions on topical issues concerning political developments in Russia and the party's own political activity.

Structurally, *United Russia* consists of regional (one per each territorial entity of the Russian Federation), local and primary offices. According to the official website (2017a), the party runs a total of 82 631 primary and 2 595 local offices. The highest decision-making bodies of regional and local offices are Conferences.

In 2005 a number of active party members have presented their views as for the course of Russian social and economic development that were broken down into social-oriented, right-wing conservative and liberal-conservative. As a result, the inner-party disputes now revolve around several part of the discussion board which includes: the 4th of November club, Social-conservative Politics Centre, the State Patriotic Club, Liberal Club and Entrepreneurial platform.

Any Russian citizen of the full legal age can become a member of *United Russia* given that he supports the party's ideas, complies with its regulations specified in the charter and takes part in its political life. As of today, the total number of members has reached 2 000 000 and still counting. 59 % of members are office employees, 18 % — workers, 6% — pensioners, 5% — students, 4 % — entrepreneurs, 8% work in other spheres. In 2005-2008 a significant number of other parties' members fell into the ranks of *United Russia* (Kostenko 2008). By 2012 only three oblast governors had belonged to other parties.

According to the most recent poll results presented by *Public Opinion Foundation* on November 17, 2017 as many as 45 % of Russians support *United Russia*. There have been found some differences between the attitudes of men and women towards the party. The approval rating among women is higher (51 %) then in men (38 %). Also women have been found to be less indifferent towards the party and two times less likely to adopt negative attitude. The complete set of attitude indicators is presented in the Figure 10 (POF 2017).

ATTITUDE	In general	Men	Women
Positive	45	38	51
Neutral	24	23	24
Negative	8	11	5
Indifferent	24	28	20

Figure 10. Russians' attitudes towards *United Russia*, % (POF 2017)

United Russia is exceptionally electorally successful party. As of 2017, the party's Parliamentary seat total is 343 out of 450 seats. In the Figure 10, we represent the percentage of the popular vote collected by the party on the last four State Duma elections and the corresponding number of parliamentary seats (Russia Votes, n.d.).

Year	Percentage	Seats in the State Duma
2003	37.6%	223 / 450
2007	64.3%	315 / 450
2011	49.3%	238 / 450
2016	54.2%	343 / 450

Figure 11. *United Russia*'s results at The State Duma elections (Russia Votes, n.d.)

It should also be noted that *United Russia* was first to introduce the concept of primary elections to the Russian political system. This model was first realized in Russia at the State Duma elections of the 7th convocation.

The party's official income is unprecedentedly high. According to *Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation* report, *United Russia*'s income amounts to 8 230 401 043,31 rubles as of 2016 (CEC 2017). Due to the party's popularity it is often called a "party of power", a "catch-all" or "big tent" party. Although some authors claim *United Russia* to be a sui generis phenomenon (Roberts 2012b), we agree with Reuter (2017, 200) who states that it should be compared to other dominant parties. Reuter then goes on to define some of the common features *United Russia* shares with other ruling parties. Among others, she names limited institutional strength of *United Russia* and mutually dependent position of the party and elites (ibid.).

Reuter's conclusions correspond to those drawn by Roberts in his monograph on *United Russia*. Roberts (2012a) states that even though it is a ruling party, the power of *United Russia* is, in fact, limited. It depends on the federal executive group headed by V. Putin.

Originally, the party was created by this group and to this date continues to depend on its political resources. As Roberts argues, *United Russia* does not perpetuate the model of dominant-power politics (2012a, 7), but rather serves as a representative of the federal executive's interests (2012a, 35).

Many scholars claim that the party was created with a view to solidify president Putin's power (Andrews 2017). *United Russia* serves as a platform that presents the president's ideology of cultural nationalism which appeals to a wide base of population (ibid.). Not coincidentally, independent polling in August 2016 showed Putin's approval rating to be as high as 82 % (Brock 2016). *United Russia* facilitates communication between different power centers and Putin, attracts members of political elite and ensures that the State Duma is dominated by Putin loyalists (Andrews 2017). Ironically, Roberts (2012a, 9) points out that *United Russia* bears resemblance to the *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (CPSU).

There have been numerous claims as for the party's infringements. For example, in 2007, when the party gained 64.3% of votes on legislative elections, an observer team formed from *Council of Europe's* and *OSCE's* Parliamentary Assemblies stated that the elections were held in an atmosphere which seriously undermined political competition, hindered political pluralism and had failed to meet standards for democratic elections (Jeffries 2011, 332).

Allegations of electoral fraud have been suggested by some of the videos posted on Youtube, for example, a 2016 security camera footage shows a polling station official shoving a stack of ballots into a ballot box (NowThis World 2016). With the application of Gaussian method Shpilkin was able to detect 14 % fraud on Russian Duma election of 2016 (Karlin 2016). He found that the number of votes *United Russia* received doesn't abide with a single bell curve relative to turnout which could be explained by adding fictitious votes (ibid.; see Figure 12).

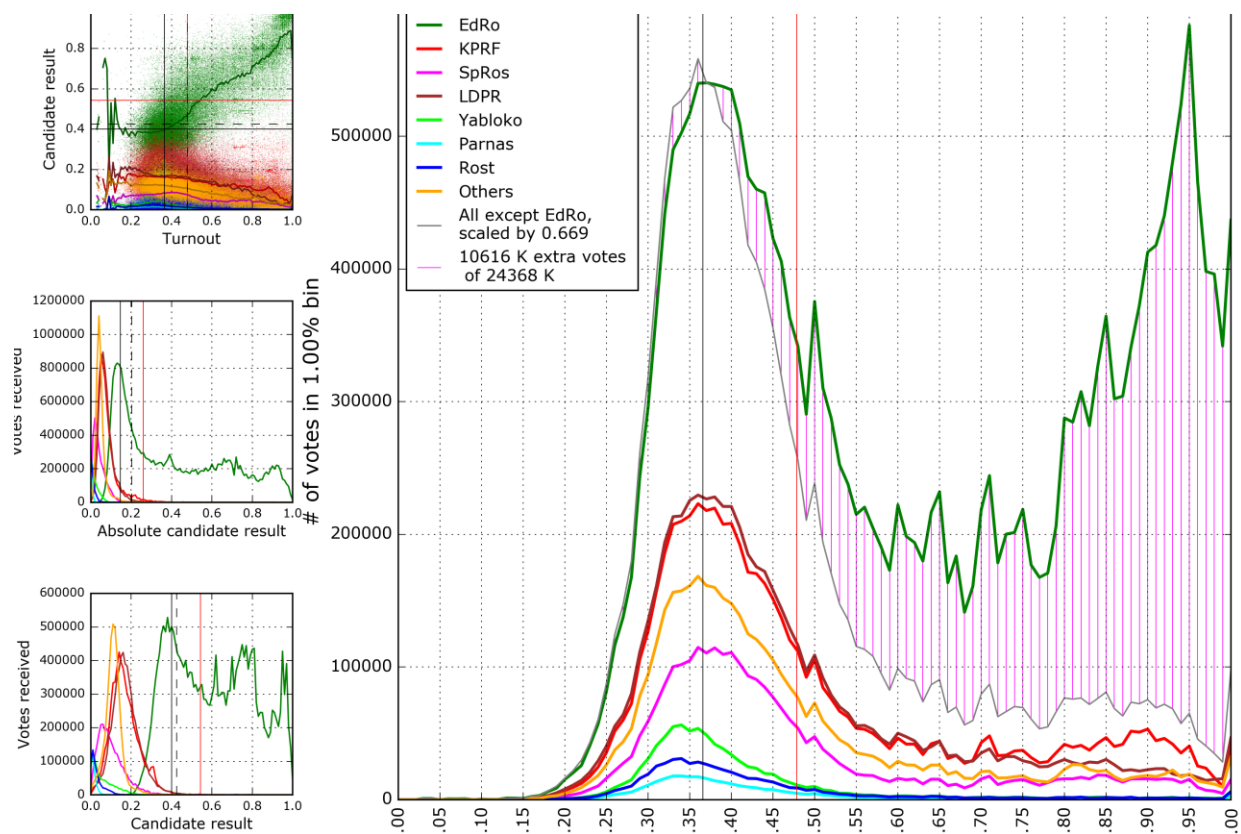


Figure 12. Russian legislative election of 2016 results (Shpilkin 2016)

The party suffered multiple allegations of crime and corruption. With a helping hand from Alexey Navalny the party's opposition slogan became "Against the party of swindlers and thieves". In regard to this Putin argued that corruption should rather be treated as an ever-present "companion" of those in power and not something a single party can be accused of. There have also been some purely anecdotal accusations of satanistic symbolism in the party's logo (the bear's shape resembling that of a goat, the shape of its legs reading upside down the word "Christ" in Hebrew, thus, meaning "Antichrist" and a number of letters corresponding to number 666).

Critics argue that *United Russia* lacks well-defined ideology and thus targets mainly the segment of non-ideological voters. It appeals to such concepts as "unity", "centrism" and "a powerful state". As Medvedev himself stated at the party's XVI Congress, "Our party unites people with different views from all walks of life. Our discussion board is divided into several platforms but we pursue the same goal — to make Russia successful and powerful" (UR official site 2017b).

In spite of the party's lacking a coherent ideology and the aforementioned allegations *United Russia* remains quite popular among Russian citizens. We believe this is due to successful implementation of political marketing strategy which we are going to analyze in

the next subchapter.

3.3 The Implementation of Political Marketing in “United Russia”

Political marketing implementation by *United Russia* is a fairly complicated and rather ambiguous topic. Given its scope, we believe that truly comprehensive and extensive study into *United Russia*'s marketing activity could only be accomplished by research teams which is why the present paper doesn't claim to be exhaustive. Instead, we focus on the most prominent aspects of *United Russia*'s political marketing.

3.3.1 *United Russia* as a Market-oriented Party

A concept of a market-oriented party was introduced by Lees-Marshment. According to her, such a party designs its political offering based on voters' needs (Lees-Marshment, 2001c, 30).

We argue that *United Russia* positions itself as a market-oriented party that forms its political offering to meet people's needs. One of the primary areas of the party's focus is the implementation of numerous infrastructure and social development projects designed to improve citizens' quality of life across all of the major spheres. As D. Medvedev claims, "The party's projects are formed in accordance with our pre-election pledges and become our highest priority during law-making and adopting federal budget resolutions when our party votes for their enactment. As a result, we are able to meet actual needs of the citizens" (UR official site 2017b).

Olga Batalina points out that the projects of *United Russia* aim at realization of the party's program for the State Duma elections of the 7th convocation (Dorofeev & Rozhkova 2017). According to the party's official site (2017c), in the nearest future *United Russia* will work on 25 projects, including "Civil Control", "Safe Roads", "Russia's Ecology" and "Civil University". Among this years' recent projects is "Local community centre" which includes the sections "Russian Libraries", "Culture and Time" and "Cinema Club". Other recently launched projects focus primarily on infrastructure: "Urban Areas", "Small Towns' Parks", "Small Towns' Theatres" etc. The project "The School of Well-informed Consumer" aims at raising awareness on housing and utilities infrastructure issues.

At the party's XVI Congress D. Medvedev (2017) pointed out that in the last 5 years nearly 3 million people had contacted *United Russia*'s reception offices seeking help in resolving infrastructure and social issues. In particular, the party assists and protects legal rights of the interest-holders who had fallen victim to fraud. Due to the party's activity 195 000

people had reclaimed possession of their apartments and households.

Developing housing and public utilities is another party's priority which is stated in its program (UR official site 2016). A real indicator of efficacy of *United Russia's* activity in this field is a 15 % increase in the percentage of population satisfied with the city public services (UR official site 2017e).

Last but no least, is the development of the agricultural sector. Due to *United Russia's* optimization of agricultural policy, Russia now holds the first place in the world by wheat production (UR official site 2017e). The party also works to improve the farming community's level of life.

Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that the party's political offering that addresses a whole spectrum of the voters' needs.

3.3.2 The Party's Political Advertising

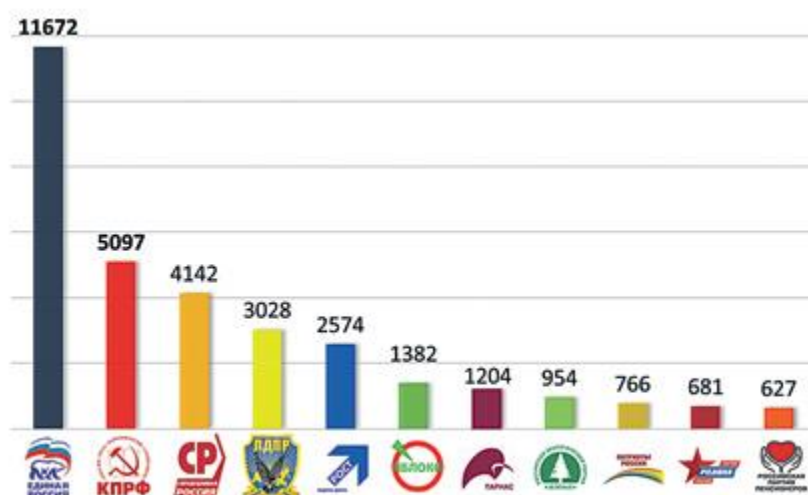
United Russia pays a lot of attention to TV political advertising. We've studied more than 20 of the party's political clips from 2007, 2011 and 2016 electoral campaigns. Their common feature is tapping into people's innermost values such as unity, patriotism, national pride, family values, time-honored traditions etc. For example, one of the party's most popular political ads of 2016 features Medvedev talking about the most recent achievements in the agrarian sector (Rusreklama 2016). The clip invokes the following values: national pride, self-sufficiency, dignity, respect and gratitude towards the agricultural workers. Visual imagery of crops and beautiful village landscape reinforces positive emotions. Many clips contain a seemingly empowering message designed to psychologically manipulate the voters. It is said that it's up to people themselves to create a better future for Russia and that's why they need to vote for the party that can ensure it.

Most of the party's political clips don't have a plot. Some of them feature opinion leaders such as Tereshkova (the first woman in history to have been in outer space) or celebrities (Ereshkova and Kuznetsov); others — common people, especially workers.

Overall, most of the party's TV ads created quite positive impression with one exception, namely, one of 2011 electoral campaign ads that had the slogan "Let's do it together!" and featured some sexual activity happening in the voting booth (Bukentagen 2016). Having watched the clip, many voters expressed their disappointment and indignation in the Youtube comment section underneath the video. *United Russia's* advertising agents had

learned their lesson and have never featured this kind of content from that time onwards.

United Russia's TV coverage and the number of appearances on the federal channels significantly outweigh the quantity of the competitors' air time. As the Figure 13 shows, the total number of TV appearances made by *United Russia* during 2016 campaign is 11 627 while its competitors had an average of only 2 046. As we see, due to the party's



considerable income it can afford to buy expensive air time to ensure its electoral success. Figure 13. The number of appearances of different political parties on federal mass media channels during 2016 election campaign (CPRF 2016)

United Russia also uses a wide array of modern online-based advertising technologies. First of all, it has its own beautifully designed user-friendly and easy-to-navigate official website <https://er.ru> which has the following sections: News, The party, Who is who, Join the party, Press Service, Supporters, On-site search. Unfortunately, as of 2017, *United Russia's* site lacks English version.

The party uses modern internet techniques to target specific segments of voters. During 2016 State Duma election campaign, the party's political advertising agents had found a way to address specific age groups of voters by using Internet filters. The ad that targeted young adults had a catchy title: "Are you active and young? It's time to make a choice!" The filter settings were set so that the ad was being displayed to the following segments of Internet audience:

- gender settings: men — 56 %; women — 44 %;
- age settings: 18 to 21 years – 26 %, 21-24 – 20 %, 24-27 – 16 %, 27-30 – 15 %, 30-35 – 18 %, 35-45 – 4 % (Kurakin 2016, 199).

Advertising agents also found a way to approach differently male and female audiences. They placed different ads that would appeal to specific values of men and women. An ad that read "We've managed to open a first-aid post in Molzhaninovo" was being displayed to women aged 35-45. The same group had been targeted by another ad with a title "50 000 schoolchildren enjoyed *United Russia's* recreation program" (ibid.). Both political ads tapped into the inner-most needs of Russian women, that is, to stay healthy and to ensure better life for their children. The age range was also adjusted perfectly: by their mid 30-40 the majority of Russian women are married and have children and are more concerned with health issues compared to the younger groups.

A group of Russian men aged 45 and older was targeted differently. They were shown an ad with the following title: "Safeguarding motorists' ideas" (Kurakin 2016, 198). This was an efficient marketing ploy too given that many Russian men of this age have reached a financial milestone of buying their own car and thus, want to secure their rights and possessions.

Therefore, we conclude that Internet political marketing of *United Russia* is quite promising and its techniques are efficiently employed by the party's marketing agents to target specific voter groups.

During pre-election periods *United Russia* political campaigners are often seen in Russian streets wearing beautiful white bear costumes attracting curious onlookers (see Figure 14). We believe that such costumes not only make the job of political promotion workers more effective but create a positive image of the party in general as funny cartoon-like costumes are more prone to rise positive emotions in potential voters.



Figure 14. *United Russia* campaigners in promo costumes

3.3.3 Social Media Marketing of *United Russia*

United Russia actively employs Internet marketing techniques and productively uses social media as a tool of voter engagement. As of November 20, 2017 the number of subscribers on Twitter is 155 184, Vkontakte — 70 887, Odnoklassniki — 62 606, Instagram — 27 594, Facebook — 24 100, which brings the total number of social media subscribers up to 340 371. Interestingly, the party's Odnoklassniki page had spurted very rapidly in popularity in 2016 (with the rate growth of around 90 %) but virtually stopped attracting new subscribers in 2017. The party's Vkontakte audience had increased gradually by 10 000 subscribers compared to 2016. In the past year both Instagram and Facebook pages attracted nearly 8 000 new subscribers each. The total number of views on the party's official Youtube channel is 2,322,341 and the number of uploads is 1 018.

The party's page design is virtually the same in every social media and the content is also almost identical. It is mainly about official statements of *United Russia*, political speeches and news. Unsurprisingly, social media activity of *United Russia* peaks during election campaign. For example, during the intensive period of 2011 election campaign the party's Twitter account had inundated with tweets amounting to an average of 360 posts per day, which is more than total amount the competing parties LDPR and Yabloko had managed to bring off during the whole run of the campaign (Roberts 2015, 1235).

There are some downsides in the party's SMM strategy. The content lacks information on the activity in the regions, there is also not enough information on the party's achievements and activity results. Infographics, polling and other forms of subscriber engagement are underrepresented and subscribers rarely discuss the party's posts. Furthermore, Facebook subscribership might have been bigger if the party had made the group open from the very beginning. But with that being said, *United Russia* firmly holds the leading position on social media websites.

A common Internet marketing technique is content marketing which involves filling the social media page of political actors with specific content that appeals to an average representative of the target audience. An average subscriber of *United Russia* Vkontakte page is a young man of 29 years of age or older with a higher education degree who lives in Saint-Petersburg (Kurakin 2016, 200). He is interested in current social events and science, therefore, the group moderators manage the content accordingly.

3.3.4 *United Russia's* Charity Work

United Russia's charity work is one of the main directions of its activity. As of November

2017 almost 400 site entries are tagged under the word "charity". These activities are extremely diverse and include helping low-income families, emergency & disaster relief, improving infrastructure, helping orphanages, tackling ecological issues and many more (UR official site 2017a). The party members organize social events on account of Kindness Day and other holidays that raise people's values.

United Russia members support veterans of the Great Patriotic War and present them with memorable gifts, postcards and some food items on Victory day (Figure 15). For example, according to the news on official party's site (2017), 1320 Bryansk oblast



veterans received such gifts this year.

Figure 15. *United Russia's* Victory day gifts for the veterans (UR official site 2013)

The party members organize celebrations on the occasion of New Year and greet children with sweets. Occasionally they visit and give New-Year presents to the children from low-income and multi-child families. Figure 16 represents Orenburg party members preparing for such activities.



Figure 16. Orenburg party members preparing New Year events for children, December 2016 (UR official site 2016)

The party's charity work is its way of reaching voters addressing their needs and can be viewed as a kind of PR technique.

3.3.5 Political Memorabilia and *United Russia*-themed Products

United Russia produces numerous political memorabilia items (Figure 17) that include stuffed toys, souvenirs, clocks, watches, cups, Christmas tree decorations, keychains, T-shirts, balloons, pens, lapel pins, USB-sticks, fridge magnets, calendars and many other. Some of the items bearing the party's symbol are quite expensive, for example, at *Sunny-Amber* online shop (2017) we found souvenir boards bearing *United Russia* logo encrusted with amber stones sold at about \$ 140 a piece.



Figure 17. *United Russia* political memorabilia

Occasionally, political aficionados engage in making *United Russia*-themed hand-made products themselves (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. *United Russia*-themed hand-made

3.3.6 Development Prospects of the Party

The party's secretary of the General Council, Andrey Turchak pointed out that at the present time nominating a presidential candidate is of the foremost importance to *United Russia*. He then claimed that rotation of office awaits party's members in the nearest future and that the split in the party should be avoided at all costs (Kommersant 2017a).

Turchak also states that the new practices are to be introduced, including the following:
— social media monitoring specialists should be appointed in each regional office;

- a new structure of multiregion committees is likely to be introduced after the next Congress in December, 2017;
- the financial backing of the regional offices will be substantially increased through the redistribution of funds (ibid).

At the party's XVI Congress D. Medvedev (UR official site 2017b) also stated that the discussion panels will be held at least every year; it should be noted that in the recent years they had been held rarer.

Overall, the party will continue conducting its policy according to the program. First of all, *United Russia* will take measures that ensure economic stability and regional budgets' "immunity" to fluctuations in economical system. Secondly, the proper conditions for conducting small and medium business will be provided. Thirdly, the party will encourage fair competition on the market and will support domestic manufacturers. And last, but not least, is to develop those sectors of economy that have the potential to thrive even under the pressure of sanctions, this is, predominantly, agricultural sector.

Some of the recent *United Russia's* initiatives include developing a new model of patriotic upbringing (Kommersant 2017b). The party members submitted a draft legislation on modern patriotic upbringing with newly defined conceptual frame. If the State Duma passes the bill the new model will come into force in 2018.

Thus, we've outlined some of the main changes concerning *United Russia* party in the future and pointed out its most up-to-date priorities.

4 Key Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of the Research Results

The research results reveal that *United Russia's* political marketing activity is quite successful and has a tendency towards improving and adjusting to the dynamics of Russian political market.

For example, in the recent years *United Russia* started to pay attention to refining its social media management and other online-based marketing techniques such as teaser ads that target specific demographic groups of internet audience.

United Russia continues to maintain an image of social-oriented party even though it's a party of power and has a lot of members from the higher strata of the society. Such positioning proves to be extremely beneficial for the party considering significant economical losses sustained due to the sanctions, in particular, by low-income regions.

Despite a common opinion among international community, *United Russia* had succeeded in endorsing Russia's external political agenda among the majority of citizens and even by inner opposition forces.

Having analyzed political marketing movements of *United Russia* as well as its competitors we had an impression that sometimes behind-the-scenes games were at play. We admit that such PR techniques have conspiratorial nature therefore, it's extremely hard to analyze them and these assumptions remain speculative, therefore, it is one of the limitations of our study.

With that being said, *United Russia* had managed to maintain and even increase its approval rating and ensured its favourable position in the upcoming presidential campaign.

4.2 Ethical Viewpoints

The research sheds light upon questions which decisively hold significance for the whole world and its future.

Russia is a regular member of United Nations and is considered to be one of its founders as a legal successor of the USSR. Russia has the largest territory in the world and is the richest country in terms of its natural resources. Moreover, this country has not yet

reached its full potential in terms of cultural, scientific, economic and demographical development. The basic idea we are building up this argument to was eloquently put by the Chief of Staff of the US Army, M. A. Milley. He considers Russia to be number one threat for the US and the only country that can destroy it. Milley argues that among other countries possessing nuclear weapons it's Russians who have the most massive weaponry (RiaNews 2015).

In this regard, to secure the future of the world we're obliged to study the dominant political force of modern Russia so as to understand its political behavior. This is especially topical for international scientific community at large and politologists and political marketing researchers in particular. Which is why we adopted impartial attitude to ensure the highest level of objectivity. To be consistent in our analysis we have considered all kinds of information, i.e., neutral, *United Russia*-oriented and opposition-oriented.

4.3 Reliability and Validity of Research

Reliability and validity are key aspects that refer to integrity of academic research. Trustworthiness of the research depends on several factors such as the ways of collecting and analyzing data as well as making consistent conclusions.

The majority of sources we used while conducting the research were ideologically neutral while others bore certain positive or negative overtones. It's important to note that we considered both praises and strongly worded and provocative accounts of the party's activity with equal impartiality thus, trying to eliminate any researcher biases that are, nevertheless, bound to appear in many cases where the researcher is supposed to provide his own interpretation of this or that political issue.

Moreover, we have considered personal perspectives and opinions of acquaintances (not only Russians) which proved that there exists a wide spectrum of opinions and accounts of *United Russia*'s marketing activity among the citizens. The official public opinion research supports this argument, thus, we consider it to be reliable.

The concept of validity refers to being factually sound. In the paper we haven't distorted or manipulated information in any way. We have provided integral accounts of the information from analyzed sources and given a fully consistent interpretation.

Thus, the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical research conduct which signified academic integrity. Therefore, the overall validity of the research is considered

to be at a high level.

4.4 Suggestions for Future Research

We suggest several directions of future research related to the topic of *United Russia's* political marketing. First of all, to comprehensively evaluate political marketing efficiency it's crucial to conduct large-scale surveys and polls with respondent sampling representing different societal stratas. In such a way reasearcher would be able to analyze marketing efficacy judging by the way it influenced different segments of voters and to compare these datasets. It is advisable that the surveys contain many open questions so as to encourage people to state their opinion. Conducting interviews would only benefit such a study; it is especially interesting what people from the Russia's far-flung provinces have to say about *United Russia's* political activity.

Secondly, a study of *United Russia* opposition groups and their marketing would also contribute to comprehensive study of this topic as well as a research into *United Russia's* counteraction strategy. This political material provides rich ground for conducting comparative studies. We could also analyze opposition claims by A. Navalny, V. Maltsev, V. Kvachkov, K. Petrov and many others as to their validity.

Thirdly, the actions of Russian dominant political force regarding some controversial issues concerning the neighboring countries such as Ukraine, Japan, China and Baltic countries is another worthwhile topic for future research. Such a study would be particularly relevant and up-to-date because the battle for the Arctic is just unfolding and would become more severe in the nearest decades seeing that Russia and other countries are willing to claim their possession of continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean which is extremely rich in natural resources. Thus, a study in *United Russia's* external politics would be very topical.

Furthermore, studying political systems of various countries holds cultural significance since the ways in which politics is conducted and the tools involved in this process reflect the people's mentality. Thus, Russian political market may be a subject of cross-cultural study. By studying Russian political images one can also gain some insights into the psychology of politics and psychology of leadership.

Quite possibly, *United Russia* employs some neuromarketing techniques so it is worth looking into that too, given the fact that it's a brand new and very promising field of research.

5 Conclusion

In this part of our thesis we will delineate the main features of efficient political marketing that are exemplified by *United Russia's* political activity in relation to the main constituents of political marketing we've defined earlier.

1. Setting the goals of the political campaign

The first and most prominent feature of *United Russia's* political marketing is its market-orientedness. The party shapes its offer according to the citizens' needs and develops projects designed increase people's level of living and facilitate the country's to economic development, as well as to improve Russia's international standing. *United Russia* seeks to communicate an image of the party that represents people's interests and protects human rights. Even though there have been numerous allegations regarding corruption and fraudulent activity (which applies to ruling circles of many countries) we can positively state that the party is committed to social development and strengthening of Russia in major and profound way.

2. Conducting environmental analysis and opinion research

United Russia has developed an efficient public opinion monitoring system that reaches all the regions and voter segments. The party's political marketing agents constantly work on enhancing this system. This is evidenced by the following activities: increasing number of primary offices representatives in the party's governing board, conducting thematic conferences, visiting local sites by high officials, instituting the staff position of public opinion monitoring agents at the local level etc.

3. Political market segmentation

The party increases its voter support both quantitatively and qualitatively and targets many voter segments simultaneously by appealing to specific people's values that are relevant to each group. A system of *United Russia's* reception offices had been created for this purpose. It is fair to say that most of the party's activities are segment-specific.

4. Positioning

United Russia's positioning is exemplified by the party's advertising in different media channels. The main values its advertising taps into are the following: unity, national pride, cultural heritage, patriotism, family values, ecological awareness and others.

The party's positioning within Russian political market revolves around several main ideas: unity of Russia, economic development, preserving cultural heritage, building strong sense of national identity (both in Russians and other ethnical groups living in Russia), strengthening Russia's stand on international political arena with a view to build and maintain mutually beneficial relations.

The role of *United Russia* in raising the moral fiber of Russian citizens can hardly be overestimated. Reclaiming and solidifying moral values is a long-term process that modern Russia needs to go through, especially considering the period of M. Gorbachev's perestroika and freewheeling 1990s that significantly undermined people's values.

5. Image-building

The question of what kind of political image *United Russia* aims to create and implant in the minds of citizens remains to be discussed. However, we can characterize it as a "fair-minded builder of society".

Most recently, the party increased its activity in the regions so as to maintain and improve its position at the local level which, admittedly, is something that the party's competitors (CPRF, LDPR, A Just Russia) became good at before *United Russia*. So, this exemplifies how the party improves its marketing and adjusts to the competitive political environment.

The party's political activity is consistent with its claims and so *United Russia* provides financial and legal support for vulnerable groups of citizens and does a lot of charity work.

6. Managing political communication

United Russia has developed a diversified series of activities designed to manage political communication most efficiently. Even though some criticize it for excessive use of lobbying power and censorship it is hard to substantiate these claims. We tend to believe they have been exaggerated. A German publisher Regina von Flemming stated in one of her interviews for "Deutsche Welle" that she had never been called from the Kremlin (DW 2017), however, she had received numerous calls from different commercial entities asking not to publish some information that would otherwise undermine their image. V. Pozner argued that there is no state censorship in Russia (except for so called "self-censorship").

Despite the party's successful political marketing techniques implementation there is still left some room for improvement and development in the future.

First of all, *United Russia* has to reinforce its positioning as a social-oriented party. In this regard, a positive experience of the European countries (especially, Norway) comes to mind, although Russia would need to have a higher GDP level to successfully replicate it. To our mind, the solution lies in creatively employing USSR experience of conducting social politics, yet, it's important to give it a new spin. This would help to raise the party's approval among the older groups of citizens. Also it is important to improve the state of far-flung provinces than have a lower level of life than in industrially developed regions.

Social media marketing needs to be improved qualitatively. This holds true for subscriber involvement. The party needs to conduct more polls, surveys, contests for its subscribers to keep them involved. The most active social media participants have to be encouraged. The content should be more interactive and contain more infographics.

Another particularly topical issue has to do with introducing preventive measures. *United Russia* should take preventive measures to counteract the destructive actions of pseudo-patriotic and extremist movements, as well as unconscionable opposition and agents of foreign influence. This aspect is particularly important considering bitter Ukraine's experience of colored revolutions.

United Russia has to continue its work among the youth. We consider the work of the party's youth organization *Molodaya Gvardiya* to be already successful but more resources should be poured in its programs implementation. The youth is the country's future and, pragmatically speaking, a future electorate.

Beyond any doubt, the party has to collaborate with other dominant parties from different countries and work more with international mass media which would improve Russia's image on the global political market.

Finally, we believe that the number of ecological project *United Russia* develops is insufficient. The party needs to raise ecological awareness of young children and adults and take actions that would improve Russia's ecological state. It should encourage recycling, conduct conservation programs etc.

In a nutshell, we conclude that the key to the efficacy of *United Russia's* political marketing is appealing to citizens' needs and values with the help of powerful positive political image being reinforced by efficient communication techniques and information management in different media channels.

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